THE WILLIAM TERRY TOUCH

ALPHABET

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THE WILLIAM TERRY TOUCH ALPHABET

FOR USE BY THE DEAF AND BY THE DEAF-AND-BLIND

With a Brief Sketch of the Achievements of Dr. William Terry During Fifteen Years of Total Blindness and Deafness.

1201 LEADER-NEWS BUILDING
CLEVELAND, OHIO

October 9, 1916.

New York Circulating Library for the Blind
New York City.

Dear Sirs:-

Knowing your deep interest in the education of the deaf and of the blind, I take the liberty of sending you herewith a pamphlet giving an account of the achievements of my grandfather, Dr. William Terry, between the ages of seventy and eighty-five, when he had become totally deaf-and-blind, and describing especially the Touch Alphabet invented and used by him.

I have never happened to hear of any other system, which, by the use of a marked glove, enables the deaf-and-blind person to converse freely with any one, even though the other person has never before seen the system used; nor have I ever seen so inconspicuous a hand alphabet for communicating with the deaf. This system proved of such incalculable value in Dr. Terry's case, that I am seeking to spread a knowledge thereof in the hope that it may benefit others.

If you are interested in having further copies of this pamphlet, or know of others who might be, I shall be glad to supply you or them.

Very truly yours,

Harold T. Beck

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FOREWORD.

This account of the William Terry Touch Alphabet and the circumstances which led to its invention, and of the other achievements of Dr. William Terry during the last fifteen years of his life, when he was totally deaf and blind, has been written in the hope that his example may prove a help and inspiration to others, whether deaf or deaf-and-blind, and especially that they like him may find his Touch Alphabet a means of preserving contact with the world around them so that they too may be partakers in its life and helpers in its progress.

For more detailed information upon any points kindly address Mr. Harold T. Clark, 1201 Leader-News Building, Cleveland, Ohio, who will be gratified to hear from any one who may make use of the William Terry Touch Alphabet.

MARY T. CLARK,
HAROLD T. CLARK.

September 1st, 1916.

THE WILLIAM TERRY TOUCH ALPHABET FOR USE BY THE DEAF AND BY THE DEAF-AND-BLIND.

With a Brief Sketch of the Achievements of Dr. William Terry During Fifteen Years of Total Blindness and Deafness.

The writings of Miss Helen Keller have told what remarkable results may be attained by patient education of the deaf and blind. Her writings have dealt chiefly with the education of the young. The possible ways in which the lives of those who have become shut off from the world by loss of the precious senses in their mature years have not been so well presented. The number of persons who, after years of activity, as the result of accident or other cause, become either partially or wholly deaf or blind is surprisingly large. For them to be deprived of contact with others is perhaps even harder than for those who have never heard and seen. Few persons, however, who find themselves in such hard circumstances are able by their own efforts to find the way of relief and far too few are the seeing and hearing people who know how much such blind, or blind-and-deaf, persons can accomplish. The same is true to a lesser degree in the case of those who merely lose their hearing. Too often a deaf person, with the acquiescence of his family and friends, fails through ignorance of certain simple means to preserve direct contact with the world at large and gradually drifts into a life of unnecessary isolation.

A brief story of the experiences of and of the remarkable resourcefulness exhibited by Dr. William Terry, who lived for many years at Ansonia, Connecticut, and who died there in 1908 in his eighty-sixth year, after having been totally deaf and blind for the last fifteen years of his life, will show, as well as any example possibly could, how a person, seemingly cut off from every-

thing that makes life worth living, can get back into touch with the world known to the senses and lead a happy, useful life.

After being engaged in active practice as a physician and surgeon for nearly fifty years, Dr. William Terry entirely lost his sight. He had already become totally deaf. But when, at the age of somewhat over seventy, he thus found himself cut off from all communication with others, his active mind was not daunted. He set out at once to learn the art of reading embossed print, and invented the manual or touch alphabet which will be more fully hereinafter described. The following paragraphs, which were dictated by Dr. Terry when he was eighty-two years of age, after he had been wholly deaf and blind for more than ten years, tell some of his experiences and observations, which should be of help to others.

> "The account which I shall give of my own blind career may, I hope, stimulate every old blind person to learn the art of reading embossed print by the fingers. About fifty years ago, Dr. Moon, a learned English teacher, lost his sight. He undertook to teach old blind people to read, but could not succeed by means of any embossed print then in vogue. He was a man of noble soul and wonderful executive ability and invented a system of embossed print very boldly and prominently embossed and in many ways admirably adapted to the use of old blind people with an exhausted sense of touch. By means of that system and the finger point systems I have read many books and their contents have afforded me great comfort and benefit during my long, lonely days and wakeful nights. I can read for a few minutes only at a time, and then have to get plenty of rest and recreation. The few minutes during which I can read are exceedingly precious, for when my mind must be left to roam unbridled, it feeds on the green pastures through which it has lately been driven. I was more than seventy years old when I became unable to read anything by sight and my friends thought that I could not learn to read. I have never had the benefit of visiting any

of the institutes for instruction of the blind, or of any assistance beyond what my own family have given me, but by patient toil have surmounted all difficulties in a degree which is surprising to myself.

"The American Braille is really the best system of embossed print that I can imagine. The size of its characters and spaces and the position of its characters are exactly right. The whole of every character comes under the finger at once. Another great advantage is that it may be readily written by means of the eight line Pocket Braille Tablet, which costs but one dollar, and is much the best of all the tablets I know of. I advise every person who loses his sight in old age to learn the American Braille, uncontracted. And let him practice writing it by means of the tablet above mentioned. There is, in the City of Philadelphia, a free circulating library for the blind. By an order of the United States Postoffice Department the books of the blind may be sent through the mails postage free. This ought greatly to increase the efficiency of the library, which has already done noble work.

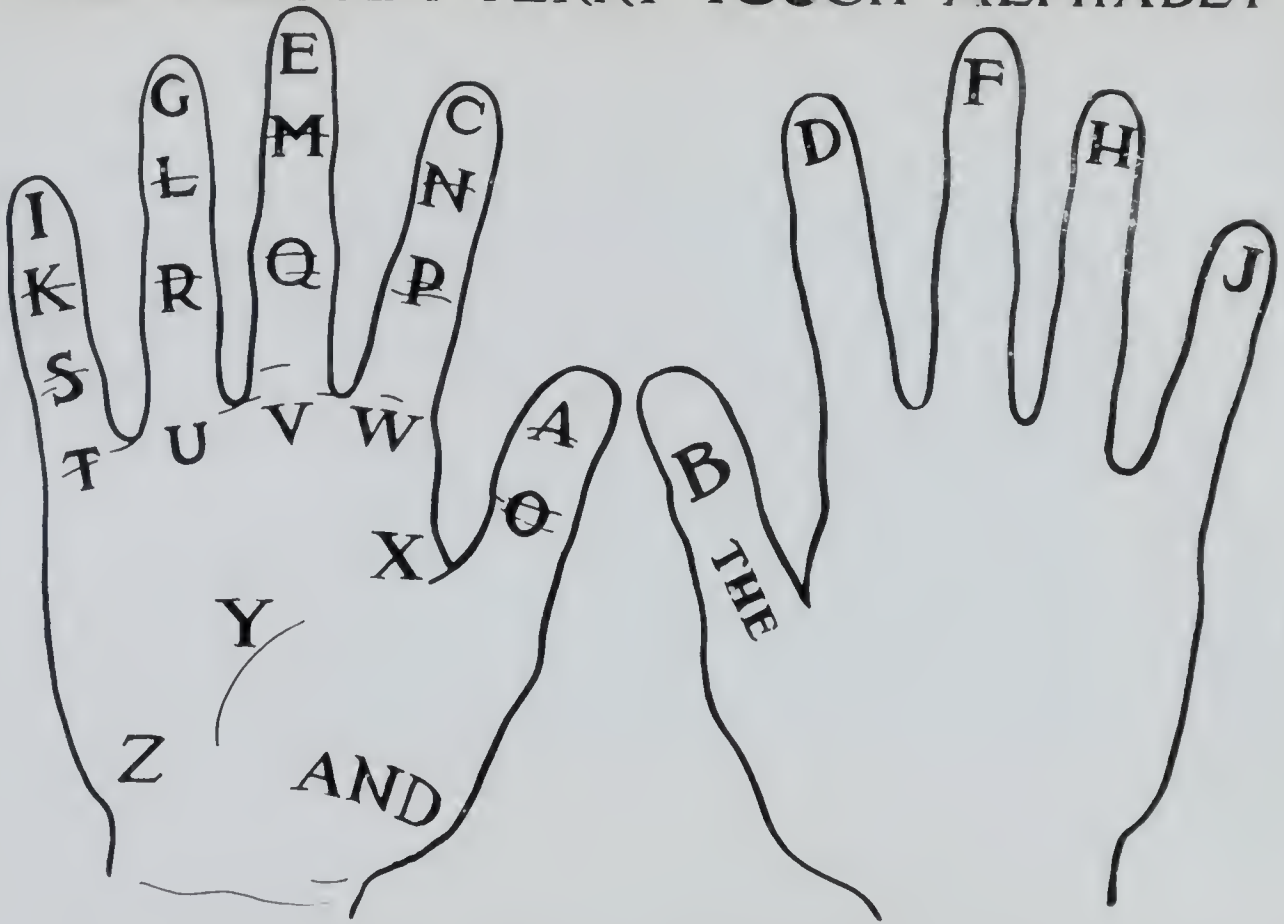
"I found myself a dozen years ago in what the wonderful Miss Helen Keller calls the valley of twofold solitude, totally deaf and blind. I could converse with no one, and had to invent a system of touch alphabet for the hand, which by the use of a marked glove, has enabled me to enjoy the benefits of conversation. I would that the system might benefit many others as it has me. No other system would have served me so well. By it I have been kept well informed on current events and in sympathy with the rapidly advanced and ever advancing philanthropy and Christianity of our blessed times."

The William Terry Touch Alphabet for use in finger-spelling is a clever invention, and for speed and ease of communication and, especially because of its adaptability for use with a marked white glove, certainly far surpasses any other blind alphabet which is in common use. Briefly the system is as follows:

It makes use of the places on the right hand where the sense of touch is most acute; that is, the tips of the fingers and the creases at the joints. Dr. Terry's experience as a surgeon suggested this thought to him, and a moment's trial will convince one that when any of these points is touched the exact location may be told very quickly. A is on the tip of the thumb, B on the thumb nail, C on the tip of the index finger and D on the nail, E on the tip of the middle finger and F on the nail, etc. This process brings J on the nail of the little finger. Then the next letters move back across the front of the hand on the first creases. Thus, K is the crease at the top joint of the little finger, L the corresponding crease on the ring finger, M on the middle finger, N on the first finger and O on the thumb. Now back across the hand by the next lower row of joint creases; P on the lowest joint of first finger, Q on middle finger, R on ring finger and S on little finger. Then drop down as before and go back across the hand on the lower level, thus: T at base of little finger, U at base of ring finger, V of middle finger, W of first finger, X at base of thumb, Y in palm of hand, Z on left side of hand.

This arrangement of letters will readily be understood from a glance at the accompanying illustration. It is an especially good arrangement not only because of its compactness but because it brings the vowels and letters most frequently used in places on the hand where they are readily found.

THE WILLIAM TERRY TOUCH ALPHABET



RIGHT HAND-FRONT VIEW RIGHT HAND-BACK VIEW

It is well to add that various ways of saving time may be devised. Thus, a touch on the right hand means "Yes," touching the left hand signifies "No," and touching the forehead "I don't know." Moreover, there are certain word signs like a touch on the wrist for "and" and phonetic spelling like "r" for "are." The end of a word is signified by gently touching the back of the hand. Then the deaf and blind person will repeat aloud what he has understood. If a mistake is made in the spelling or understanding of a word the hand is closed for a moment as a signal to repeat.

Upon his left hand, Dr. Terry arranged figures ingeniously, giving numbers from minute fractions up to decillions.

As has already been stated, by using a white glove marked with the alphabet anybody can readily talk with the deaf-and-blind person, although the "speaker" never tried the system before. All that is necessary is to touch the letters as marked on the glove. This is a great advantage over the ordinary methods, where the one who wishes to converse must know the special manual alphabet.

It was Dr. Terry's custom to keep a marked glove in his pocket. Whenever any one came to see him he would reach in his pocket, put on the glove and enjoy a good visit. For fifteen years he was thus able to keep in close touch with such of his relatives and friends as lived near him. Those who lived at a distance wrote letters which were read to him, and hardly a day passed during this entire period of fifteen years without his learning the news immediately upon the arrival of the daily paper. As a result of his talks with different people, each one of whom would bring him some item of information from the world at large, he acquired a remarkable knowledge of current events. This frequently led him to ask questions as to the details of scientific discoveries and of political or economic movements at home and abroad, which made his seeing, but less well informed, friends feel quite abashed.

DR. WILLIAM TERRY,
HAVING THE DAILY PAPER READ TO HIM BY MEANS OF HIS TOUCH ALPHABET SYSTEM.

The alphabet affords an excellent method of talking with the deaf as well as with the deaf and blind. It has been used with great success as a medium of communication between two deaf people, and also between a person who is deaf and one who is deaf-and-blind. After the alphabet has been memorized, which experience has proven takes only an hour or two, it is unnecessary to

use the white glove. When the glove is not used the system is much less conspicuous than the usual deaf alphabet signs, and can be used without attracting the least attention by two people sitting near each other in church, at the theatre, on a train, or elsewhere. It permits of use at a considerable distance and has been found in practice to be of great value to deaf people at the dinner table. One member of the family who knows the system can, without attracting any attention, keep a deaf member or guest, even though seated at the other end of the table, fully advised as to the subjects under discussion, and thus makes it possible for him to take part in the conversation.

For exercise, which was an absolute necessity for Dr. Terry's active mind and body, he kept a wood pile. During one year, he would reduce two cords of hard wood, four feet long, to kindling wood. Sawing wood was a pleasure and "equalized the circulation," he said, but chopping was his favorite exercise. Protecting his hand with a thick leather glove, he would place a stick of wood on the block and bring down the axe within an inch of his thumb, with unerring aim, without ever cutting himself. Constant exercise kept his right arm strong and muscular.

Gardening also was a peculiar pleasure. With the aid of guide ropes by the paths he could find his way, and by placing a small ladder on the ground, could plant seeds for a small garden, using the sides for the straight lines and the rungs for distance between. Beans were his especial delight in his garden, because they were easy to plant, could be trained by him around the poles, were readily picked, and finally gave him pleasure in shelling.

In his home he was perfectly independent, knowing, as he expressed it, "the geography of the house". A continuous rail guided him up the stairs to his bedroom, and, on the lower floor, an overhead trolley of fine twine, scarcely visible, guided him to his easy chair. For walking exercise indoors, a clothes line about thirty feet long

was always ready to be stretched double in a wide hall, where he could move rapidly and fearlessly between the protecting ropes on either side. This was a great boon for safe and quick exercise.

Being of a literary turn of mind, he delighted in books and passed many pleasant hours standing at his reading desk, where his books in the Moon Type or American Braille were always ready, his fingers moving rapidly over the raised type.

He committed to memory poems and hymns for the solace of his wakeful hours, spent in bed chiefly out of consideration for the other members of the household. Oft-times he would slip down stairs to his beloved books after the family were asleep and search out a few precious nuggets of wisdom with his fingers. Then a vigorous rocking in his favorite rocking chair would make a few hours of sleep acceptable.

Whittier's "Snow Bound" was his first poem, read in New York Point Print, and he found great pleasure in memorizing the whole poem. Longfellow's "Potter's Wheel" was another favorite gem in his memory collection. Hardly a well-known hymn could be read to him, which he could not finish after the first line. Hours in the night were spent in repeating these hymns for enjoyment and for exercising his voice, which for this reason never became impaired during the long years of imprisonment from sound.

The time of day he could tell by a clock with the glass removed, and he seldom forgot the day of the week.

One favorite occupation of his last years was smoothing laths with pumice stone and sand paper until they were perfectly smooth, then making holes about three inches apart, the whole length, to admit air, for use as ventilators placed under the windows. One summer on the Maine coast, he stripped nearly a barrel of balsam into small twigs, suitable for balsam pillows, which were made up and presented to a library fair.

Prohibition of the sale of liquor was the cause nearest to his heart, and he dictated several articles for publication on the evil effect of alcohol on the moral as well as the physical system. In this view of alcohol, the result of personal observation during his medical practice, he was thirty years ahead of his time.

Dr. Terry, although not beginning to read blind type until after he was seventy years of age, mastered three distinct systems: The Moon, the American Braille and the New York Point, and read a multitude of books in each. He learned to use an ordinary typewriter so that he could write letters to his seeing friends. He also learned to use a typewriter writing raised characters, as well as the Pocket Braille Tablet, so that he could write to some of his blind friends.

"It is a mistake," he used to say, "to think that old people have nothing to do, except to be kept warm and comfortable." Dr. Terry always insisted that what he had done any deaf and blind person could do, the real difficulty being to make seeing and hearing people realize this fact. In his own case, instead of being a burden to his family and those about him, he became an inspiration to all with whom he came in contact, showing by his example how it is possible for one to live a cheerful, valuable life despite barriers which at first seem insurmountable.

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